



Newsletter

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## DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES ON THE UKRAINIAN CONFLICT

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Throughout the past month I had the pleasure to attend seminars with Paulo Portas, former Foreign Affairs Minister of Portugal, Ana Palacio, former Foreign Affairs Minister of Spain, and Javier Solana, former High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, former Secretary General of NATO, and former Foreign Affairs Minister of Spain, regarding the ongoing war in Ukraine. In just a few hours, all three presenters were able to examine the current problem and provide us with their perspectives on all of the players involved.

### Context

Following the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, three former Soviet presidents joined forces to form the independent countries of Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine. The latter yielded its nuclear weapons in exchange for its independence and a condition that established that the signatories of the independence would defend Ukraine's frontiers if it were necessary.

But it was not until 1997, during the NATO Summit in Madrid, that NATO offered to sign an accord with Russia in order to create a new institution: NATO-Russia and carry out an approach to the newly

formed country. At the same time, NATO offered Ukraine the same accord, creating an institution NATO-Ukraine. This closeness between Ukraine and the West was not always viewed positively by Russia, as evidenced by the events leading up to the occupation of Crimea.

In 2004, Ukraine held one of its first democratic elections, and Russia was unable to sway the outcome. At first appearance, the results appear to have given pro-Russian Viktor Yanukóvich the presidency, a result clearly influenced by Putin. This heightened political tensions in Ukraine, which culminated in a rerun of the elections following agreements with the Russians. Viktor Yushchenko, who is best known for his assassination attempt during his election campaign, was elected president in this latest election.

Tensions flared again in 2008, when the NATO Bucharest Summit took place, at a time when Georgia and Ukraine were considering joining NATO. With pro-Russian president Victor Yanukóvich in office in Ukraine, tensions reached a new high in 2014, before the occupation of Crimea, at a time when Ukraine was on the approach of signing an economic agreement with the EU. Russia refused to allow Ukraine to sign the agreement. The true Russian aims can be seen here: Russia does not want Ukraine to join a Western system that they loathe.

## Actors

**Putin** has invested much too much in his own historical narrative, believing Ukraine to be the birthplace of Russia. The primary issue he's discovered is internal resistance in Ukraine and Russia, especially when compared to the response to the 2014 takeover of Crimea. The lack of a front with the look of guerrilla warfare, as well as internal Russian government difficulties and the concern of destroying a country they wish to acquire, has only made the battle more difficult for Putin.

The **European Union** has been extremely responsive. On the one hand, we were able to witness Germany resolve to ship armaments into an active war for the first time since World War II during the Munich Security Conference. On the other hand, the rapidity with which sanctions have been imposed, has been astounding. Not to mention Poland's rapid response to the refugee crisis, cleaning up 2015's embarrassment. Other countries, including France, have become critical players in the negotiations. France is the only European country with nuclear weapons, which has resulted in Emmanuel Macron as Europe's primary negotiator with Russia. Another noteworthy aspect is that due to this geopolitical situation, Denmark will be holding in June a referendum to end its opt-out and join European security and defense programs.

The issue stems from the European Union's flaws. To begin with, the EU lacks a European defense, which means it is reliant on the US under the NATO framework. Second, Europe is energy-dependent on Russia. The EU initiated an approach to becoming a union in the sphere of energy in 2002 during the Council of Barcelona, but it was not until 2007 that we started talking about an energy union, energy security, and energy transition (today's European Green Deal). The biggest issue arises in 2014, when the EU abandons its concern for energy security in favor of concentrating its resources on energy transformation. This means that we are still reliant on Russia due to the EU's lack of investment on energy security.

The **United States** is tired of fighting wars in other countries and of being in charge of world security. They're tired of being chastised by the same people who initiate wars, and they're beginning to realize that if Europeans want defense, they should pay for it.

Finally, there's **China**. China does not want the war to continue; China's GDP is heavily reliant on commerce with Western countries, hence they applaud European mediation efforts. Although China may have greater control over Russia than any other country, it is the first customer of more than 100 countries and does not want to be left alone in the UN. On the other hand, this is Xi Jinping's final

year in office, which means that before he can be re-elected, he must be chosen by the Communist Party Congress, something he is unwilling to leave to chance.

## Conclusion

This condition leaves us open to a variety of possibilities:

- First, there's the prospect of the Donbass being independent and pro-Russian.
  - Second, Russia taking control of the Donbass region, Crimea, and Ukraine's seaport, thereby turning the country into a landlocked country.
  - Third, Russia achieves its goal of capturing Kyiv. If such is the case, there are two options: negotiate with a puppet government and having an exiled Zelensky, or march to Western Ukraine for a whole country occupation, which would mean being entirely surrounded by NATO countries.
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## Sources

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